2:Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1939
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casual and light-hearted affairs, more like an English picnic than a serious job of work. On one such occasion the company was about twenty or thirty strong, men, women, and children,[1] and carried provisions for a day or two's expedition as well as the baskets of *ububa* and pestles to pound it. On the banks of the river it is common to find remains of grass shelters used on previous expeditions, and little hollows in the ground made by those who had pounded *ububa* leaves there on other occasions. Here the women gathered together in twos and threes, each with a heavy pestle, and stamped the leaves in rhythm. Each trio was composed of near relatives, three sisters, or a mother and daughters, any kinship group in fact that had worked jointly at the cultivation of the *ububa*, and had rights of ownership over it. The women sang special fishing ditties while the men lay idly by and shouted the flirtatious remarks that are typical of activities in which the two sexes co-operate in groups.

When the baskets were filled with the crushed leaves they were carried to the edge of the river. The first day of this communal fishing demands special prayers to the chiefs of the land (*shya-mfumu shye calo*) to open the season. They must be uttered by the headman, often a descendant of the dead chiefs, and at any rate appointed to his position by the present holder of the title. On this occasion the headman was in a state of ritual impurity, so the task devolved on his maternal grandson, a boy of ten, sexually immature and therefore incapable of ceremonial defilement.

He was called on by the eldest man present by the honorific plural *Ba*, and both gravely knelt on the grass with crushed *ububa* in their hands. The old man recited the names of the dead chiefs 'the owners of the land', and then both threw a handful of the crushed leaves into the stream. Every one stood a moment and then the children plunged into the river with the big baskets of *ububa* and began rinsing the contents to and fro in the water (*ukunungila*). The height of the river only stood to the children's waists, the ideal height for fish poisoning.

The *ububa* appeared to dissolve quickly in water since the whole surface was green with it, but it took about half an hour to act on the fish. In fact in some cases I was told the poison is put in overnight.

[1] Only the old people remain behind to watch the babies, and any menstruating women, since the latter are believed to bring ill luck to the fishing, the only Bemba activity which is subject to this common taboo.

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
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fire when it is first placed to the breast, or when the cord falls off (*ukumwalawila*). If its father is away and the ceremony of 'taking the child' cannot take place, the baby is given medicine (*umuti wa lueshya*). The mother and the midwife extinguish the old fire, mud the hut and light a new fire. Then they carry the baby to the men's shelter where there are presumably many youths 'with heat' or 'with bad things', or to a kitchen where the people have been known not to have done the purification ceremony. In this dangerous company, they give the baby gruel cooked on the new fire to make it immune. The rite of *ukumukokotola* is a ceremonial spitting of raw food on the baby by a menstruating woman so that the baby can be safely touched by a woman who is in this condition. All these methods are believed to secure immunity on homoeopathic principles.

The chief's sacred fire, the fire of the land, must be protected with even greater care. It is placed in a separate hut and watched by a senior wife, past child bearing. The chief's food is usually cooked by a man and not a woman.

To remove the dangers due to sex intercourse a special ceremony is required and this is one which can only be performed by a legally married couple. Hence the close links between the rules of ritual and those governing marriage ties, and the great importance of magic belief in determining the strength of the marital relationship. At marriage each girl is presented by her paternal aunt with a miniature pot about 2½ inches in diameter which must be guarded with the utmost secrecy. With this the purification rite is carried out. It is filled with water and placed on the fire, man and wife each holding the rim. Water from the pot is then poured by the wife on to her husband's hands, and some say on to the wife's as well. New 'pure' fire is then relit either by means of fire-sticks, or, as is usual nowadays, with matches. This apparently simple rite is the essential act which removes the condition of hotness from the body of man and wife and renders them free to touch a hearth with impunity or to approach the ancestral spirits. Some say that it used to be performed after each sex act and others that it was merely done before some ceremony of special undertaking such as harvesting. It is still spoken of with the utmost secrecy and shyness and still survives even in the face of strong opposition from

3: Richards E-5 (1930-1934)1956
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833 missionaries. In the ritual life of a chief the pot ceremony is of par-
783 ticular importance.[1]

581 The ritual links uniting a married couple are thus particularly strong in this society. It is husband and wife who perpetually carry out the dangerous act of sex together, who thereby put themselves in each other's power, and who depend on each other for the ceremonial purification which neither can carry out alone.[2] The marriage relationship is ritualized from the start.

372 On important ritual occasions, such as the 'warming' of a new
783 village site, the installation of a chief, a marriage, a death, or the protection rites for a young child, the old fire must be extinguished and a new fire lit with fire-sticks or matches, and the floor of the hut freshly mudded over. These are signs that the pollution is definitely removed. The fire is also harmed by objects or persons that are 'cold'. Contact with a dead body makes a fire cold, or
[841] contact with a menstruating woman, who is described in polite speech as 'being in a state of coldness' (*Akuba na mpepo*) or as 'fearing fire' (*atina umulilo*). People who eat food cooked on the fire by such women are liable to illness.

841 The most constant danger to the family fire is in fact the touch
372 of the housewife herself, when she is passing through her periods. Then she must be careful not to touch the family fire that her husband or her children use. She has her own small fire separate from the main fire, and if it goes out, she can only borrow from a woman past child-bearing or a girl who has not reached puberty.
[833] Intercourse with her husband would be almost unthinkable for her during these days and there are heavy penalties attached to the showing of the menstrual blood by accident. A girl who allowed a drop of blood to fall on her husband's bed or who washed in the stream where others washed is thought to threaten illness to those near her. I was told she would be punished by her fellows by being made to sit over a fireplace till her flesh was scorched.

At the end of a period the old fire is extinguished; a ritual act of
[784] intercourse takes place and a new fire lit (*ukusangulula*), the word used for the similar purification performed after a village has been polluted by death.

[1] Cf. my *Land, Labour and Diet in Northern Rhodesia*, 1939, p. 365.

[2] Only the head wife of a polygamist can perform the pot ceremony for him. Hence the legal and ritual difference in status between her and her co-wives.

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were serious and interested, but I could not interpret it fully. I was told it was to teach the girl not to pretend to be thirsty when she had already drunk. The spraying of saliva in the air is the usual Bemba way of asking the blessing of the ancestors.)[1]

A small hollow was then cleared in the wet mud and Nangoshye balanced herself on both elbows over it, swinging herself to and fro above the muddy pool.

The women sang:

> '*Following the ways of God*
> *We imitate our mothers.*' (No. 27)

(The details of this ceremony are obscure to me. Nangoshye explained that she swung over the hole in the mud to 'imitate our mothers who bore us' and implied she was representing the act of birth. She also said she was teaching the girls how they were to bathe in the river during menstruation, that is to say, apart from others so as not to contaminate the stream. P.B.M. referred to the song sung at the same time as meaning 'Sometimes we do not follow Lesa (God) but follow our mothers.' This seemed to be an explanation of a Christian type, but the idea of the passing down of tradition and the passing down of the child from the womb seemed to be implicit. A.C. writes: 'It is our duty to follow God, to pass on knowledge as we had it passed on to us. We make you a mother as your mothers were to you.')

The *banacisungu* were then pulled forward. Their clothes were kilted round the waist and they were pushed into the muddy water and thoroughly splashed all over. Then they were washed, cleansed and covered over body and face with whitewash. The white clay was brushed on with meticulous care with a grass brush. A lump of black mud was put cross-shaped on the head of each girl and decorated with the usual pumpkin seeds and red dye. Their heads were then covered with a cloth and, still with down-cast eyes and apparent embarrassment, they led the procession back to the village. The women sang:

> '*We tracked a lion in our garden and reported it,*
> *The hunter has not forgotten.*' (No. 28)[2]

[1] *Wilaba cilaka nga amina menshi! awikasakaminawa!*

[2] *Subsequent Bemba interpretation.* (A.C.): The ceremony is like the spots of the leopard which never change or are forgotten.

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## The Interpretation of the Ceremony

It is difficult to separate this aspect of the ceremony from the other acts that compose it since the whole chisungu is thought to contribute to this end, but the theme of the removal of danger is seen in a number of isolated songs and mimes. In one of the first songs, the danger is described as a stone that falls off the girls. The menstrual blood is represented throughout by the colour red on pottery emblems and house designs, by the red cam wood enclosed in the emblem bundles, or the light of the torch glowing red inside the model of the star (see Appendix C).

The blood is removed by whitening. One of the designs on the hut wall is known by the archaic term for whitewash. The girls themselves are painted white like the egret and they are likened to beautiful white birds. The egret is modelled as a clay *mbusa* to be given to the candidates on the last night.

Red cam wood is also used as a sign of safe return from battle. The candidates and the main actors in the ceremony were daubed with the crimson powder on four occasions—after the first jump over the faggots; on the seventh day after the first woodland ceremony; after the whitening magic; and on the last day when the symbolic lion is brought back dead to the village. The girls and their families have done something fearful and they have succeeded. They have been through danger and have escaped. The culture teaches terror of menstrual blood. The chisungu provides the means of safety. It is magic of protection which can only be secured, like other forms of magic help, by carrying out prescribed acts and by paying penalties or dues to those in possession of the secret, in this case the *nacimbusa*. It is also a series of representations or mimes depicting safety and giving a sign that safety has been reached.

The magic of fertility is also clearly another of the elements in the chisungu ritual. The whole ceremony makes the girl nubile and thus potentially fertile, but different acts are more specifically described as reproducing the sex act. They call to mind the fish which is a fertile animal and lays many eggs. One of the hut drawings also depicts a fish. The *musuku* tree is associated with fertility and is honoured in the first woodland rite. The gardening mimes are carried out at its roots. The mock bridegrooms appear with leaf horns on their heads like the witchdoctors who possess fertility magic. A snake is said to be hidden in the roof of the hut.

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## *Songs Sung During the Ceremony*

*No.* 40. *The star* (*ntanda*) (Fig. 3). This is a big pot with a narrow mouth and perforated sides. A lighted taper is put inside so

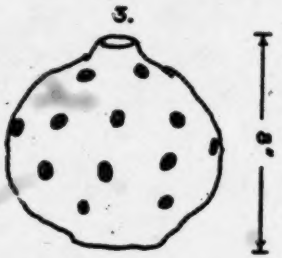


*Fig. 3. The Star (with perforations so that a lighted taper will burn inside).*

that it shines out to represent star-light. A pottery lid is then fitted on top and the initiated girl must balance it on her head, if possible with the torch remaining alight inside. The company sings:

| | |
|---|---|
| *Ulekashye ntanda bushiku;* | You gaze at the stars at night; |
| *Ulantuka ukashika.* | You revile me obscenely. |

*Interpretation.* Here there seems to be a complicated double meaning, and probably more than two. Women answered questions about this figurine with shame and hesitation. They said that the light which shone through was the blood inside the woman, which it is so terrible to display. *Ukashika* is to be grave, weighty but also to become red. The most horrible curse a man can use is to swear by the menstruation of his wife. It is a thing which a woman can hardly bring herself to whisper in explanation. The surface meaning is, however, given cheerfully. However badly a husband swears at his wife, she must not answer back. This is a typical example of words with a readily repeatable meaning and concealed associations known as 'things underneath' (*fintu fya panshi*).

*No.* 41. *The little spoon* (*kakombo*) (Fig. 4). The initiate stands opposite the 'bridegroom' on the last night of the ceremony.[1] She pretends to pour water on 'his' hands with the model of the spoon

[1] Represented by his sister.